

UNITED STATES SENATOR • IOWA

CHUCK GRASSLEY

RANKING MEMBER • SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

<http://grassley.senate.gov>
press_office@grassley.senate.gov

Contact: Jill Kozeny, 202/224-1308
Jill Gerber, 202/224-6522

For Immediate Release

Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2003

Grassley Plays Key Role in Extending Unemployment Benefits

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Chuck Grassley, incoming chairman of the Committee on Finance, was a leader in ensuring the Senate's passage today of extended unemployment benefits for out-of-work Americans. Grassley's committee has jurisdiction over the legislation, but Grassley felt the issue was so important that it should receive direct consideration by the full Senate. It did, on the first day of the Senate's new session.

"Unemployment benefits are the bridges that help people get from one job to another, Grassley said. "These benefits aren't huge, but they're certainly better than nothing for those who are out of work and desperately looking for jobs. People have to put food on the table. They have to heat their homes. They have to buy their kids clothes, shoes and school supplies. Their needs are immediate, and they need immediate relief.

"While Congress is approving unemployment benefits, we need to do everything in our power to create jobs. I don't mean just any jobs, but quality opportunities that pay enough income to sustain families and build careers. I look forward to working with my colleagues and the President on creating jobs. Americans are the world's greatest workforce. Folks need and deserve to use their abilities and skills to the fullest."

Last fall, before Congress adjourned, Grassley helped to broker an agreement between Senate Republicans and Democrats on extending unemployment benefits. The Senate passed the legislation, but the House failed to act before the 107th Congress adjourned. Afterward, Grassley vowed to make the issue a priority in the first days of the new Congress.

Today, the first day of the Senate's new session, Grassley and his colleagues brought the measure up for a vote; the bill passed without objection. The Senate approved a plan to provide up to 13 additional weeks of federally funded unemployment benefits to workers who exhaust their 26 weeks of regular state unemployment benefits. The Senate-passed plan will provide extended benefits to those who exhaust their regular benefits before the end of May. The measure will cost \$7.3 billion.

According to media reports, House Republican leaders said they will consider the legislation Wednesday.

Congress created the federally funded 13-week extended benefit in March of 2002. That program, however, expired Dec. 28, cutting short the benefits of about 750,000 unemployed workers.

The Senate plan would reinstate those workers' benefits as well as allow other workers to qualify for extended benefits.

Labor Secretary Elaine Chao said in a letter to incoming Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist that if Congress sends the legislation to the President by Thursday, there will be no disruption in payments to the 750,000 workers.

More than 30,000 Iowans were collecting regular state unemployment benefits, as of late December, and could potentially benefit from the Senate-passed plan.